

MISCELLANEOUS.

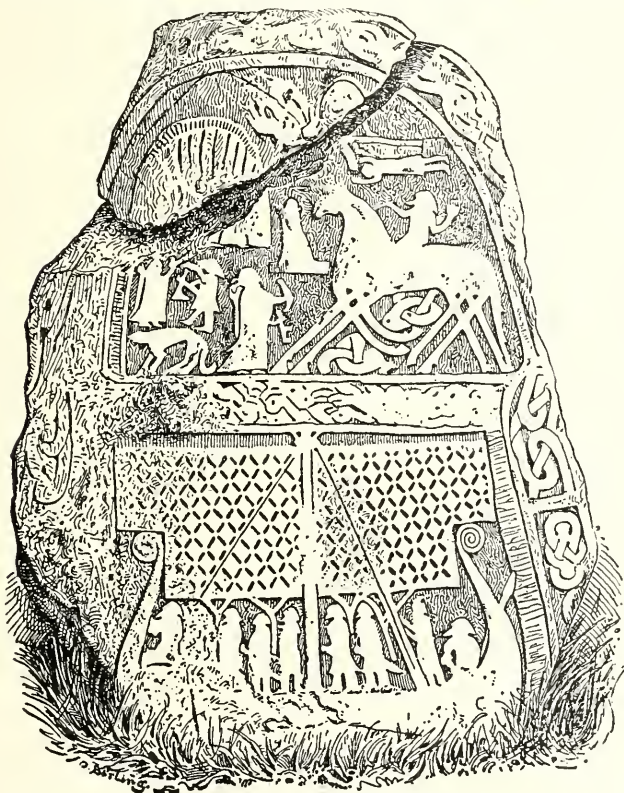
THE LESSON OF AN ANCIENT TOMBSTONE.

Gothland is an island in the midst of the Baltic between Germany and Sweden, and being somewhat isolated it is natural that customs survived there which had died out in the surrounding countries, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. The ancient paganism persevered here longer than on the continent. Such is the rule with territories in which life does not pulse as rapidly as in the centers of commerce and civilization. The pace of progress was even slower in far off Iceland, where Christianity was not introduced before the year 1004. While on the continent of Europe much blood had been shed in the struggle between the old and the new, the transition in Iceland took place in a most peaceful way in a public council where a bill to abolish the traditional paganism and introduce Christianity was presented, seconded and carried. There was no quarrel about it, not even a heated controversy. The people were pretty well agreed on the main points. The priests of the old religion became Christian clergymen, and the lands on which they lived and from which they had drawn their income in former years, continued to furnish their revenue in the new religion. While on the continent the old pagan songs and poems were systematically destroyed, they were preserved and even cherished in Iceland, being now the most valuable source of information concerning the old Teutonic mythology.

Gothland is not of the same importance, but three tombstones have been discovered there—one in Ardre, another in Hablingho, and a third one in Tjängvide—on which the dead person is represented as riding on an eight-footed horse and is met by a woman with a drinking horn in her hand. These tombstones are obviously pagan, and are presumably of a comparatively late date. We may assume that when they were erected Christianity had long been introduced in the surrounding countries. The horse being eight-footed is at once recognized as the steed Sleipnir, the famous charger of Wodan (or Odin) the All-Father of the Teutonic pantheon. But in these tombstones of which the one in Tjängvide is reproduced in the adjoined illustration, the rider can not be Wodan but must represent the deceased person.

In the illustration before us we see in the lower section a ship in full sail, and we might suspect that this vessel is the ship on which the dead were believed to cross the ocean of death, but it would be strange to have two different symbols of death presented on one and the same tombstone, the horse and the ship, so we may fairly well assume that the deceased person who rests in the tomb beneath this stone was a sailor, and the ship represents him in his occupation during his life.

The tombstone is of great interest because it represents an earlier phase of Teutonic mythology and proves that the eight-footed horse which we know from other reports to have been the exclusive symbol of Wodan, must have been in earlier days the horse of the dead representing death itself. We know from the history of the origin of Bürger's ballad that a German popular song existed with the refrain "*Der Tod reitet schnell*," "Death rides swiftly," which the poet misunderstood and incorporated in his ballad as "*Die Toten reiten schnell*." Thus we must assume that in olden times death was conceived as being either seated on a horse or being the horse itself carrying



ANCIENT TOMBSTONE OF TJÄNGVIDE, GOTHLAND.

After Hildebrand, *Sveriges Historia*, I.

the dead, and we see an old relic of this view in the report that Sleipnir was the quickest horse and that no other could beat him in a race. In the time of the winter storms which took place in the twelve nights at the end of the old and the beginning of the new year, the old Teutons believed that the dead were racing over the earth in the swiftly moving storm clouds, with the god Wodan leading their host. He was the wild hunter and he was the chief who led the souls of the dead to their heavenly abode. It is perhaps for this reason that Tacitus identified Wodan with Mercury, for the Roman Mercury corresponded to the Greek Hermes who was called *Psychopompus*, the leader

of souls. We learn from these considerations that Sleipnir, the eight-footed horse, was originally the incorporation of the idea of death and that Wodan, the leader of the souls, was originally a god of ghosts and king of the other world. The gloomy features of Wodan as the god of the dead gradually gave way to a brighter conception, and he changed into the saviour of the dead and the god of Valhalla, of heaven, to whom even during life his worshipers looked up for health and salvation. We further conclude that the old Yuletide about the time of Christmas was originally an All Soul's festival. At the end of the year the dead were commemorated, but closely connected with a memorial of the dead was the idea of a transfigured life in a new celestial home, and so the Yule festival which originally may have possessed gloomy features became a festival of joy and could easily be assimilated to the feast of Christ's birth in the new religion.

P. C.

QOHELETH TO-DAY.

BY WARWICK JAMES PRICE.

"Vanity of vanities!" the Preacher sighed,
A poet disillusioned by the tide
Of the swift passing of the burdened days
Which left vain hopes, and little else beside.

"The ceaseless swing of Time's encircled years,
"The unending round of grief, joy, smiles, tears,
"With, at the last, one door to ope and close—
"No answer to the mystery appears."

Yet is this *all*? Shall man, perplexed, dismayed,
Cast down his cards before the hand is played?
Life *is*, and Love, and Truth; a trinity
To guide us ever onward, unafraid.

The dim to-morrows do not heaven bind;
To-day enfolds it. If we seek, we find.
Our joy shall lie in labor bravely wrought,
Our high reward be serving humankind.

BOOK REVIEWS.

TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE. By *Bernhard Pick, Ph. D., D.D.* New York: American Bible Society, 1913. Pp. 59.

This little volume contains a carefully compiled bibliography of 653 versions of the Bible, or parts of the Bible, which have been made since the invention of printing. It contains a few versions omitted from the British and Foreign Bible Society's *Historical Catalogue*, and a few later publications, and, generally speaking, serves a purpose which the more laborious and learned work cannot so well perform in being chronologically arranged and compressed into the briefest possible items. Dr. Pick is well known for his painstaking and scholarly work in all lines pertaining to the rise and development of the documents of the Christian religion.

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